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HOPKINTON'S UPPER ROCKVILLE MILL LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER

A mill complex in Hopkinton's Rockville village has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture, industry, and community development. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Upper Rockville Mill to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. The Upper Rockville Mill represents the rise of the textile industry as a major component of the local and regional economies, and the influence of that industry on the development of numerous mill villages in rural towns.

The Upper Rockville Mill is located on a 3.5-acre lot at the southeast corner of Canonchet Road and Wincheck Pond Road in the heart of the village of Rockville. It encompasses two mill buildings, the site of a third building, a partial headrace with raceway gates, tail race, and dam with spillway. The two Greek Revival-style industrial buildings are the 3½-story main mill, built in 1844-1845, and an adjacent 2-story auxiliary building, built between 1863 and 1870. Both buildings are built of granite from foundations to exterior walls to simple trim. Both have gable roofs; slow-burning, heavy timber structures; and numerous window openings. The main mill has a full-length

clerestory monitor on its roof, clapboard siding at the third floor and clerestory levels, and a projecting stair tower containing the main entrance centered on the south façade.

It is not certain exactly when the village of Rockville was first established. Predating Rockville Mill were several sawmills, a gristmill, an oil mill, a shingle mill, a textile mill, and a carding and fulling mill near the outlet of Wincheck Pond, and limited residential development nearby. The Upper Rockville Mill began spinning cotton yarn in the summer of 1845; by fall, it had 32 looms installed and was making cloth as well. Rockville village continued to grow over the course of the next 25 years. New buildings included worker housing, a Seventh Day Baptist Church (1846–47), a post office and store (1849), a schoolhouse (1868), and the Lower Mill—a two-story stone dye house and beaming room, later used as a weave shed (1851).

The Rockville Mills underwent many changes of ownership. After juggling the property back and forth with their bank, the Rockville Manufacturing Company sold the mills to Ira Briggs, a former superintendent, in 1874. Briggs leased out some of the mill space to other manufacturers, but also continued to produce cotton textiles there, off and on at the same level of production, for the next quarter century. The mills continued to be run on water power.

In 1903, the property changed hands twice and “wound up” under the ownership of the Ashaway Line & Twine Company, one of Hopkinton’s largest manufacturers. The Rockville Mills produced cotton fishing line, rope, cord, and twine for Ashaway Line & Twine until 1913 and then for new owners, the Yawgo Line & Twine Manufacturing Company until 1953. Meanwhile, as Yawgo Line & Twine established itself in Rockville, another major new landowner entered the community and asserted a competing claim to local waterways.

In 1916 the Rhode Island Boy Scouts purchased 130 acres on Yawgoog Pond in northwestern Hopkinton, about a mile west of Rockville. Over the next 12 years Camp Yawgoog grew to 800 acres. The Boy Scouts soon learned that fishing, boating, and swimming at Camp

Yawgoog could be severely curtailed by the water use of local mills. By purchasing a controlling interest in the Yawgo Line & Twine Company, the Boy Scouts acquired all of the water rights to both Yawgoog and Wincheck Ponds, as well as the company's other assets, including the Rockville Mills and all of their equipment, 14 mill houses, a store, and approximately 200 acres of unimproved land. Yawgo Line & Twine officially shut down in 1953.

The 3.5-acre parcel containing the Upper Rockville Mill changed hands several times over the next half century. It eventually returned to manufacturing textiles—a company called Kay Dee Handprints made towels there. The building presently houses several small businesses, some of which do limited manufacturing, including one-of-a-kind jewelry and models for figurines and other collectibles that are mass-produced by larger companies.

The National Register nomination for Rockville Mill was prepared by consultant Kathryn Cavanaugh. According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC, “The Upper Rockville Mill is a handsome example of the water-powered mills that were built along streams throughout Rhode Island in the 19th century. Less mighty than the huge factory complexes of the Blackstone, Woonasquatucket, and Pawtuxet valleys, these smaller mills exerted influence in rural villages and contributed to the state's manufacturing economy.”

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.